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U.S. IS CHALLENGED ON SOVIET RADAR

Some Experts Said to Accept Moscow's Explanation for Goals of New Station

By **LESLIE H. GELB**
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WASHINGTON, March 14 — Reagan Administration charges that a Soviet radar system violates the treaty limiting antiballistic missile systems are being questioned by British and American intelligence experts, according to Administration officials.

These intelligence officials are said to be saying that Moscow's explanation for the radar, now under construction at Krasnoyarsk in central Siberia, cannot be ruled out. The Russians have said that the radar is for space tracking and is allowable under the treaty.

Nonetheless, officials said the prevailing view in the Administration remains that the radar, which American officials say is to be completed in two or three years, constitutes a treaty violation.

They added that the American delegation to the arms control talks in Geneva has been instructed to make a central issue of this and other purported Soviet violations, both because of the importance of the purported violations to the integrity of arms control and as a counter to what the Administration calls Moscow's propaganda attacks against President Reagan's program on space-based defenses.

American Experts' Opinions

Kenneth L. Adelman, Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, said in an interview that senior officials in different departments and agencies were "unanimous" in believing the Krasnoyarsk radar to be a violation, but that there were some differences of opinion among experts over whether the radar was also designed for "battle management."

Use of the radar for battle management or to direct missiles to shoot down incoming missile warheads is generally seen as more ominous than an illegally placed early warning radar.

Under the 1972 treaty on antiballistic missile systems, Washington and Moscow agreed to restrict themselves to no more than one missile defense site with no more than 100 antimissile missiles at that site.

The purpose of the treaty was to sharply limit defenses against missile attacks so that a side contemplating an attack would have no defense against a retaliatory blow. Thus, mutual deterrence was said to have been assured.

The sides further agreed that early warning radars could be placed only in a nation's peripheral areas and only with the antennas facing out. Deployed inland, such radars could become the basis of a territorial defense system if they were used to track incoming warheads and guide missiles to destroy them.

Only space-tracking radars and radars used to monitor arms control treaties may be located anywhere. These radars do not face at the angle of incoming warheads and so cannot be used to track them. Moscow insists those are the purposes of the Krasnoyarsk radar.

The Reagan Administration's contention is that this radar is an early warning radar and that its location, about 500 miles from the Mongolian border, violates the treaty.

British officials were said to have asked for intelligence data on this matter several months ago and to have submitted a preliminary report on the radar at the end of January. Administration officials said that the British report called the battle management charge "unlikely" and the Russian contention that the radar was for space-tracking purposes "plausible."

The complicating factor to the British analysts and some American intelligence experts is that one radar can serve several purposes. These experts

noted that one of the American early warning systems, known as Pave Paws, also is used for tracking objects in space.

These analysts and experts are also said to argue that from what is known of future plans for orbiting Russian satellites the location and direction of the Krasnoyarsk radar might be useful for space tracking.

But even these British and American officials are said to believe that the most likely explanation is that the radar is for early warning purposes, and is being built at Krasnoyarsk rather than on the nation's periphery for reason of topography.

According to several Administration analysts, the only area of the Soviet Union that was not covered by early warning radar was in the northern Pacific region. They said that a number of years ago Moscow built two radar stations on the periphery in the tundra facing in that direction, but that given the nature of the tundra, the stations could not be maintained.

Angle of Antennas

"So what they tried to do," said one Administration expert, "was to build the radar inland near the trans-Siberian railway where they could maintain it and hope they could pass it off as a space-tracker."

The consensus among senior Admin-

istration officials, including Mr. Adelman, however, is that the decision to place the radar in Krasnoyarsk is more probably an attempt to lay the basis for a Russian "breakout," as they call it, a major step toward a general territorial defense system.

They say that an early warning system in that location makes little sense since Moscow would be losing about 6 minutes of warning time, because of the station's location inland, out of a total warning time of about 22 minutes for a submarine-launched ballistic missile.

These senior officials also contend that the antennas are aimed at the angle for incoming ballistic missile warheads. The skeptics say the angle is mostly toward the horizon and thus consistent with an early warning function.

The senior officials acknowledge that there are no interceptor missiles nearby for the Krasnoyarsk radar to manage and control against incoming warheads. But they say the radar could "hand off" information to other such radars near interceptors in the future.

The skeptics argue that the radar is not "hardened," that is, defended and protected against a missile attack. The Administration position is that these elements could be added later.